

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
PROPOSED HYDE POND DAM REMOVAL PROJECT
STONINGTON AND GROTON, CONNECTICUT**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in partnership with the Connecticut Fund for the Environment's Save the Sound Program, is proposing to remove the Hyde Pond Dam on Whitford Brook in Stonington and Groton, Connecticut. The purpose of the proposed project is to restore passage for migratory fish in Whitford Brook to 4.1 miles of stream, eliminate the danger of dam failure, reduce local flooding, restore natural river flows that transport sediment to nourish marshes and beaches, and improve water quality.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulation [CFR] 1500-1508), and the implementing regulation (36 CFR 800). The EA analyzes the potential impacts of three alternatives on the human environment. These alternatives include a No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action (preferred alternative), and one additional action alternative.

The Proposed Action involves full depth and partial width removal of the spillway, as well as the creation of a pilot stream channel via limited excavation of impounded sediment upstream of the existing Dam. Under the additional alternative, the Dam would be removed, but no sediment excavation to create a pilot stream channel would occur. Under the No Action Alternative, the Dam, which is in poor condition, would remain in danger of failing, and upstream spawning and rearing habitat would continue to be inaccessible to migratory fishes. Water quality would continue to be impaired in the impoundment by sediment accumulation, low water depths, warm water temperatures, and decreased oxygen levels.

The Proposed Action will have negligible, neutral, or in many cases beneficial impacts on natural and cultural resources such as water quality, air quality, sediment chemistry and dynamics, threatened and endangered species, fish and wildlife resources, wetlands, and public recreation and safety. Impacts to cultural resources, including National Register-eligible cultural resources such as the Dam, will be addressed pursuant to section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 W.S.C. 470f), through documentation of the Dam and its related historic components, as recommended by the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office. There were no objections to the proposed project from either the Mashantucket Pequot or the Mohegan Tribal Historic Preservation Officers after reviewing the design plans.

During the permitting process, 30-day public comment periods were held for the Army Corps of Engineers Programmatic General Permit and for the State of Connecticut Water Quality Permit. Public meetings with abutters of the project site were held on October 31, 2013, May 8, 2014, and December 12, 2014. A meeting with the Inland Wetland officers was held at the Groton and Stonington Commission on May 10, 2014. Several articles about the project have appeared in the New London Day and the Westerly Sun. This

extensive public involvement has resulted in resounding support from residents, including all landowners abutting the project site, and public officials.

Based on review and evaluation of the environmental effects as presented in the EA, the Service has determined that the Hyde Pond Dam Removal Project is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. The project will result in a net ecological benefit to the Whitford Brook ecosystem, and would complement ongoing interagency efforts to restore migratory fish to the Mystic River-Whitford Brook watershed and the Atlantic Coast. Therefore, the Service has determined that a Finding of No Significant Impact be issued for the proposed project.

28 Aug 2015
Date



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Reference:

Environmental Assessment, dated 28 Aug 2015